

Elton John gets all the screams and fame but in reality ... ELTON NEEDS BERNIE

"IF ONLY I could just get up on stage and bang a tin or something I'd feel better," said Bernie Taupin. He doesn't, of course. Instead he paces the corridor backstage like an expectant father, sharing the birth-pangs of creation with Elton John.

The grief, the glory, the hangups and the happiness of the evening are divided equally between the performer, ebulliently confident, and the writer, nervously hopeful, mooching around in the darkness.

The spotlight is firmly fixed on Elton John. So much so that few people outside the hallowed freemasonry of pop would recognise Bernie Taupin.

He is about as tall as Elton John, probably a bit thinner, with sad, mellowed eyes which remind you of a St. Bernard with a red cask of brandy under its chin. He comes from Lincolnshire and goes back regularly to write songs there because there's too much tension in town.

Elton John prefers the town. His mother bought ABC Boogie when he was 11 and ever since then he has been into the whole razzmatazzing, yahooing, freakyscene baby.

They met three years ago through an advertisement. It couldn't have happened any other way because they are opposites. So Bernie, up from the country, found himself in the offices of Dick James Music.

Meanwhile our hero had stolen part of his name from Elton Dean, alto saxist with Soft Machine. He was christened Reg Dwight, so nobody blamed him. He stepped out to reception and said "Is there a lyricist here?"

It started in a 'caff'

They went for coffee at a caff next door. And that was the beginning of it all. Except that nothing happened for a year.

"Bernie just used to appear from the country with boxes of lyrics and I'd write songs. I never got to know him for the first year. We got nowhere. Nothing was happening. We were just a commercial team and we weren't even very commercial," said Elton John.

They only began to get commercial after they went for a drink together after one of Bernie's trips to London. "We just got smashed, decided to stop trying so hard to write commercial stuff and from then onwards everything was great," said Bernie.

Their method is straightforward. Bernie writes the lyrics, then Elton John adds the music. Bernie

explained: "I normally write songs as a result of thinking of a title or because it's something I feel strongly about.

"Then he does the music. But I don't see him while he's doing it, I just see the end product. I don't think I've ever disagreed with the way he has handled a song. We understand each other very well. It's almost a telepathic thing. I think I've only ever altered, or rather, asked him to alter anything in a song once or twice."

It's all the more remarkable because Bernie has no training in music. He writes the songs, he says, largely for himself. Elton John, however, has been playing ever since the age of 12 when he made what the handout bills as His First Public Appearance at the Ruislip-Northwood Music Festival.

'It's so good ...'

He went on to win a scholarship for part time studies at the Royal Academy of Music and studied there for five years. He has played with various groups including Bluesology when they backed Long John Baldry.

Meanwhile Bernie was up country.

"There are very few groups I like," said Elton John. He puts it down to the fact that he feels there are "too few good writers on the scene." He can't envisage a situation which would split his partnership with Bernie because "it works so well ... it would



ELTON JOHN and BERNIE TAUPIN, with Elton in the background this time.

insane to break it up."

It gets split temporarily from time to time, or rather from gig to gig. "At first I didn't want to go out on gigs," said Elton John. But he was talked into it by Ray Williams who asked me not to mention his name.

"It's so good. It's really wonderful being up there on stage with people actually listening to you, it's really incredible. It's embarrassing because I'm just the bloke up there. There's nothing special ..."

He is genuinely amazed, still, by the rapturous receptions. Most times Bernie gets along to the gig. "I feel I've just got to be there to see it's all right. Sometimes I know it hasn't been such a good night

even though the audience liked it and when we look at each other afterwards we can tell exactly what we are thinking," said Bernie.

If he can't get to a gig he demands to know exactly how it went the next day. "I get very worried about him," said Bernie.

He sits and worries for a bit while Elton John munches into a vegetable roll, holding it close to his mouth with both hands like a squirrel, only breaking off occasionally for a drink or to out into the conversation.

Bernie worries some more. Elton John finishes lunch. And they both have to go off. Elton?

Bernie? The Bolt!

DAVID SKAN